

HOLTON OF THE NAVY

A STORY OF THE FREEING OF CUBA

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CHAPTER I.

Hope and Disappointment.
Lieutenant Thomas Holton, commander of the Scorpion, made as though to place the dispatch in his pocket, then, taking pity upon his "second," who was all eyes, he turned the paper over to his junior lieutenant, known throughout the flotilla as "Bobby" Frost.

"You will leave Newport News at ten o'clock tonight with the destroyer Scorpion and proceed south to the parent ship of the First Torpedo Boat Flotilla off Key West, prepared for action."

This order was warmly welcomed by Holton and by his second in command of the grim, lead-colored Scorpion. "It looks like business, doesn't it?" observed Frost, with tentative infection in his voice.

"It does, sure," chuckled Holton. "I'm glad we had those baffle-plates fixed in the boiler. I suppose we might as well have the war-heads fixed on the torpedoes, too. The orders say 'prepare for action.' Attend to it, will you, Frost?"

"Aye, aye, sir," and Frost hurried along the grimy, oily deck to the after companionway.

The somewhat informal nature of the dialogue between the two will be forgiven by the fastidious when it is pointed out that for a month the Scorpion had been lying at Newport News on detached duty of a confidential nature under direct orders from Washington, and that Holton's sole companion aboard ship in that time had been his young second. But the period of loneliness was evidently to end in a burst of glory and Lieutenant Holton was truly thankful.

In the preceding month the mighty battle-ship Maine had wallowed down into the slimy ooze of Havana Harbor, a great hole torn in her forward compartments. In her lay one of Holton's best friends, a shipmate of pleasant days following graduation at the Naval Academy. The cry, "Remember the Maine," was sounding from Maine itself to California. The entire country was on the qui vive. Osgood, the hero of many an American football gridiron, had, as a Cuban volunteer, given up his life at the side of a machine gun; Frederick Funston had served valiantly against the tyrants of Castile and Aragon, and other Americans had given evidence that the fighting spirit was by no means dormant in the heart of a nation of "pigs and tradesmen."

With the situation thus there was little cause for wonder at Lieutenant Holton's emotions of mental exaltation. Whatever the future might hold for him, at least this seemed certain: there would be action, and that is something for which your true gentleman of the service is ever on the watch.

Something of the mood of the two young officers was communicated to the crew. There were broad grins on all the men's faces as they hurried about the performance of the various



"That Man Especially is Worth Watching."

tasks, and many of them did not forbear to turn inquiring faces toward their officers whenever occasion offered—which expressions, naturally their officers "failed" to see.

At sunset everything was in readiness, and with a sigh of relief Holton stretched himself on the narrow seat running along the mess-room and lovingly filled his pipe. Frost did likewise and then looked over at his superior.

"By George!" he cried, "think of having the opportunity of putting into practice all the things we've learned!"

"It won't be bad fun at all," replied Holton.

Frost was about to utter another thought when the doorway was darkened by the figure of a messenger.

"A telegram for Lieutenant Holton," he said, saluting.

Holton took it hastily and ran over the contents. His face clouded and he read it again. A good strong word was trembling on his lips, and he was about to crumple the dispatch in his hand when his eye fell on the messenger standing at attention.

"Oh, thank you," he said; "there is no answer."

As the messenger departed Holton handed the telegram to his second without a word.

"You will proceed at once to Washington and report to me at the earliest possible moment. Lieutenant Frost will assume command of Scorpion in your absence."

ROOSEVELT.

As Frost read the message aloud his voice quivered with excitement. "What does that mean?" he exclaimed. "Hanged if I know," growled Holton. "Isn't that just my luck! I've been working on this old pot trying to get her into shape and hoping and praying for a chance to make good, and then when there appears to be something doing, why I get skinned this way."

Frost knew exactly how the commander felt, and his natural exultation at being placed in command of the destroyer was quite swallowed up in his sympathy for a man who was his good friend as well as his superior officer.

Holton sat for a while blowing blue clouds of smoke to the ceiling, outwardly calm, but inwardly seething. He went over every act in the past month or so, but could think of nothing he had done that would warrant his recall in disgrace.

"Well, Bobby," he said at length, "you're a real live captain now. And I congratulate you."

"I feel like a man who is going to put on a pair of boots that are too big for him," remarked Frost.

"Oh, nonsense!" smiled Holton. "You're in every way qualified. I'll vouch for you, Bobby."

Frost smiled.

"Thanks," he said; "I'd rather have that from you than from almost anyone I know."

"Well," laughed Holton, "take it then; it's sincere. He arose and called to the steward."

"Oh, you, Koko," he said, "come in here and help me pack. I'm going to leave you for a while."

Dinner that evening was rather a mournful affair, neither Holton nor Frost trying to make light of the mysterious situation.

He shook hands with Frost at eight o'clock, and with Koko carrying his bag, started for the station. He had delayed rather longer than he should have done in writing supplementary letters to his parents, and now he found it was necessary to make haste if he was to catch the train for Washington. Eventually, indeed, he and Koko had to run, and as he reached the station the cars were pulling out.

The Jap threw the bag into the open doors of the rear one and Holton made the steps with a flying leap. As he did so a man who had been following the two essayed a similar flight, but his feet missed the steps and he clung to the gilded rail with his left hand.

As Holton reached down to assist him the man lost his grip and went plunging head over heels into the gravel. Evidently his fall did not injure him, for as Holton peered back along the rails he saw the fellow rise slowly and shake his fist at the departing train.

If he had known the circumstances under which he was to meet this stranger at a time not far distant, his feeling of relief when he saw that the man was not seriously injured might have been tinged by emotions of various sorts.

Having put up at the Metropolitan club, Holton passed such time as had to elapse before the assistant secretary would be at his desk in the Navy Department building in a fever of impatience.

Having at length finished his cigar and his morning paper—which bristled with bellicose matter—Holton put on his hat and overcoat and sauntered slowly toward the Capitol. At ten o'clock he went over to the Navy Department and sent his card in to the assistant secretary.

Presently his summons came while yet another man was engaged in the inner office. This man, however, brushed out past Holton as the young officer, with mingled emotion, walked into the presence of Secretary Long's assistant.

"Good morning, Mr. Holton." Certainly no evil augury was to be detected in the hearty cadence of the greeting. "Sit down, sir. I'm glad you were so prompt. That's what we need in these days."

"Thank you, sir," said Holton dubiously.

The assistant secretary observed him keenly for a moment, and then apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, he arose and paced up and down the length of his office.

"By George, Mr. Holton!" he said,

"when you realize that war is coming—coming as sure as guns, and then consider our unpreparedness for it—it makes you glad it's Spain and not someone else."

"I think the navy's pretty fit, sir," ventured Holton.

"Ah, the navy! And the army!" The words came out like bullets. "The navy is all right, and the army, too, what there is of it. The fighting men of both arms of the service are the best this world ever saw: getting things started, that is the trouble. Well, thank Heaven, Dewey's—the assistant secretary stopped short, and craning his neck forward, characteristically thrust his square jaw close to the officer's face. We've all got to do the best we can and be sure that when the blow comes it will come from, and not toward us."

Holton nodded slightly.

"I liked your action in diving overboard and rescuing two of your men last summer," resumed Mr. Roosevelt. "And I may say that a study of your record has convinced me that just at present a little respite from duties aboard the Scorpion will accrue to our mutual advantage."

The assistant secretary paused, and then as Holton made no reply, he continued:

"We are not yet at war with Spain—not yet, and in the meantime I think it will be just as well for you to remain in fairly close touch with my office—personal touch. By the way, there's a ball at the Willard tonight—"

"A ball!" exclaimed Holton. Then he caught himself. "Yes, sir," he added.

"Yes, a ball at the Willard. Here is a card—you'll note it is a personal invitation to you."

Holton glanced at it.

"I see it, sir," he hesitated. "I am—merely, merely to go there and dance? I mean—mean, sir, are there any instructions?"

"I should keep my eyes and ears open if I were you."

"Yes, sir, I'll do that, and I hope I'll be able to be of some service," he was rising to go. "Although—although I'm afraid I lack—that is, and—Holton paused and glanced irresolutely at his chief.

"That you lack definite information," said the assistant secretary, who seemed to have the faculty of reading his thoughts and expressing them before Holton himself could frame them in suitable, or, we'll say, diplomatic terms.

"Why, yes, sir—I have a feeling that the situation is indefinite."

"Yes. Sit down, Mr. Holton." Holton resumed his chair and his chief leaned forward, talking rapidly in a low tone.

"Here is the nub of the situation," he began. "In the first place we have reason, excellent reason, for suspecting that there are certain elements among the Cubans, both in the United States and in Havana, that are strongly inclined to doubt the good faith of the United States in this brewing trouble with Spain."

Holton, thrilled by the promise of revelations which these opening words conveyed, thrilled, also, by his induction into the inner affairs of the government mill, flushed and regarded the eyeglasses turned toward him, with unblinking eyes, impatient for the next word.

"Naturally," continued Mr. Roosevelt, "the Cubans are eager to avail themselves of our armed forces afloat and ashore, but after the work is all done they want us to clear out. Which, of course, we shall do, having first established some decent and stable system of government down there."

"I had not any idea our good faith was in question," observed Holton.

"It is," was the reply, "and it is

quarreling with the fact that even the

falls themselves have been utilized.

There have been efforts made to use

the current of the river below the

falls, but these efforts have not proved

commercially successful. But one has

only to ride over the gorge route from

the city of Niagara Falls, N. Y., to

Lewiston and back, over the Cliff road,

on the Canadian side, to realize at a

glance what a terrific force surges

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stand the possibilities of power develop-

ment there.—Washington Post.

Giving Them Warning.

At the annual picnic of a Manches-

ter firm one of the packers was called

upon after dinner to propose the toast

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